DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 328 365 PS 019 440

AUTHOR Rosado, Robert J.
TITLE Reducing the Suspension Rate among the Disaffected Elementary School Population.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 65p.; Ed.D. Practicum, Nova University.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Practicum Papers (043)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Conflict; *Discipline Problems; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Students; Interpersonal Competence; *Intervention; Rewards; Role Playing; School Counseling; *Student Improvement; *Suspension

ABSTRACT

An assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction implemented and evaluated a practicum intervention designed to reduce the suspension rate among disaffected elementary school students through a counselor intervention program. Goals of the practicum were to reduce the suspension rate among previously suspended students and decrease the number of potential suspensions by counseling students before a suspension situation occurred. During a 3-month period, students participated in a program in which they learned to identify their problems, get along with peers, use appropriate conflict resolution strategies, and receive rewards for their success. Parents, staff, counselors, and students participated in the program. Evaluation data indicated that the suspension rate was reduced dramatically and school staff used counselors in the program to prevent suspensions of disaffected students. Appendices provide a behavior problem documentation form, a sample clinical journal, a student referral form, a student contract, teacher feedback forms, and a sample letter to parents. (Author/RH)

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Reducing the Suspension Rate Among the Disaffected Elementary School Population

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by

Robert J. Rosado

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A Practicum I Report Presented to the Ed.D Program in Early and Middle Childhood in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Nova University

1991

PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

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January 3, 1991
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This practicum report was submitted by Robert J. Rosado under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D Program in Early and Middle Childhood and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

Jan. 24, 1991
Date of Final Approval of Report

Muriel L. Lundy
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks is given to my family for their support throughout this practicum. A tremendous debt of graditude is owed to the elementary guidance counselors for making the program work. Finally, thanks to my adviser for her help throughout the practicum.

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ABSTRACT

Reducing the Suspension Rate Among the Disaffected Elementary School Population. Rosado, Robert J., 1990: Practicum Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood. Descriptors: Suspension/ Temporary , Forced Withdrawal From Regular School Program / Discipline Policy / Discipline / Conflict Resolution / Behavior Problems - Transient or Mild Problems in Conduct / High Risk Students / High Risk Persons / Elementary Education / Elementary Schools / Elementary School Students.

This practicum was designed to reduce the suspension rate among the disaffected elementary school students through a counselor intervention program that was proactive in its approach. One goal of the program was to reduce the suspension rate among previously suspended students. A second goal was to reduce the potential suspensions through the counseling of students before a suspension situation occurred.

The writer developed a program that addressed the needs of the previously suspended population and the students who were potential candidates for suspension. Over a three month period students were taken through a program where they learned to identify their problems, get along with peers, employ appropriate conflict resolution strategies, and receive rewards for their success. Parents, staff, counselors, and students all played a part in the program.

The results of the practicum were extremely positive. The suspension rate was reduced dramatically and school staff utilized the counselors in the program to prevent suspensions of disaffected students.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Work Setting and Community

The site for this practicum is a public school system located in central New Jersey. The township is the largest in the county covering 46.4 square miles. The school system has a population of 4,150 students and is projected to have an increase in enrollment of approximately 1,000 over the next five years.

There are currently nine schools that house this student population. Seven elementary, one middle and a senior high school. Up until the 1990-91 school year the district will remain a fairly traditional school system in respect to program offerings. The new Superintendent of Schools has proposed and will begin the planning for a shift to a magnet school system during the 1990-91 school year.

The community is culturally, socioeconomically, and racially diverse. The 1980 census showed a population of 31,358 people, comprised of 72% white, 22% Black, 2% Hispanic, 2% Asian .1% American Indian, and, 1% other racial or ethnic heritage. A 1987 estimate of the township population was given as 38,500. The school systems racial composition is approximately 43% white, 44% Black, and 13% other ethnic heritages.

The income range for families is from low to upper middle. Approximately 20% of the student population is eligible for free or reduced lunch.

The eight hamlets that form the township vary tremendously in terms of the types of communities they represent. There is a definite urban area on one end of town and as you go northwest across the township the area takes on a totally suburban identity. Lastly, as you continue west there is a section of the township that is farmland and is rural in every sense of the word.

The school system is governed by an elected nine member board of education. They have the charge of appointing a superintendent who is responsible for carrying out all board policies and for the overall operation of the district. He is assisted by two assistant superintendents, eight principals, six directors, and 15 subject supervisors. There are over 300 teachers employed by the district.

The operating budget for each year must be approved by the voters every April. The approved budget for the 1990-91 school year was approximately 40 million dollars.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The writer is the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. This position encompasses supervision of all programs that are curriculum based as well a planning and implementation of new programs. All of the subject area supervisors meet with the writer, as well as three of the directors and the eight principals.

All facets of instruction are also supervised by the writer. Frequent observations of all teaching staff are a

regular part of monitoring the instructional program. All staff inservice, district field trips, conference and travel expenses, and purchase orders come through this office. Additionally, the writer is involved in personnel decisions, facility planning, and budget preparation.

Lastly, the writer directly evaluates supervisors, three directors and contributes to the evaluations of all eight principals.

The writer's educational background includes a bachelors degree with a major in mathematics and a masters degree in education and mathematics. Certifications include teacher of mathematics, bilingual teacher of mathematics, principal and supervisor, and chief school administrator.

Professionally the writer has previously held the positions of teacher of mathematics, elementary mathematics specialist, high school mathematics department chairperson, assistant principal, and, principal at the elementary and middle school level. These positions span 16 years in public education.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

The township schools are divided into k-3 and 4-6 elementary divisions. As society has changed, more of our children have to deal with many more problems than children of twenty years ago. Single parent families are on the rise and latchkey children are a fact of life. Children are bombarded from all sides with peer pressure, pressure from the growing drug culture and media influences that would have them act is if they are eighteen when they are eleven.

Many children who face these pressures are ill equipped to handle them. They are asked to take on more and more responsibility for themselves at a younger and younger age. While we have recognized that the children who now come to us, particularly in urban and urban/suburban settings, are drowning in sea of societies ills, we have done very little to improve their lot.

Children are therefore, forced to cope with the situation, using their own initiative and problem solving skills to deal with situations as the arise. Unfortunately, children at the 4-6 level are increasingly involved in conflict situations that they are ill equipped to solve.

One conflict situation is that of student versus student. The child of today, in the setting the writer has described, sometimes views this conflict as one they must

win at all costs. Initially, this might begin as a session of teasing or making fun of a person. All to often the child who is losing the verbal battle decides that to win you must be very cruel. This cruelty then leads to hostility and the child decides that the only resolution is physical confrontation. Sometimes an adult is there to head off the potentially dangerous situation. Frequently, it happens in the hallway, between class changes, or on the playground after school. It escalates quickly and punches are thrown. This then leads to the suspension of the student. Occasionally, students see that school is not the place to fight, but instead of not fighting, they simply wait to immediately after school to begin the fisticuffs.

The second source of conflict that leads to suspension, is that of student versus teacher. Students find themselves testing the limits and boundaries of teacher expectations for behavior and then react angrily to corrective action taken by the teacher. The child becomes insubordinate or willfully disobedient in the eyes of the teacher. Sometimes it is the teachers middle-class suburban values coming into direct conflict with the child's culturally diverse value system. The child is then sent to the office for appropriate punishment, particularly if the teacher feels that calling the parent is a useless endeavor. Once the pattern of behavior is repeated more than a few times, the child then becomes a candidate for suspension.

Suspension becomes the answer to all the crisis situations for this group of children. The child is often times simply applying the best solution to the situation that they are equipped with, at this point in their lives. More often that not, the suspended child can be seen riding around the neighborhood during school hours with no adult supervision. Frequently, the child has brought the solutions they used to solve neighborhood confrontations, into the school environment. The solutions employed come into direct conflict with the rules and regulations outlined by the school. The result is then a suspension, that can range from one to five days and in a severe case to ten days.

The writer has posed a solution that will reduce the suspension rate among the disaffected elementary school population.

Problem Documentation

The problems existence is documented by the review of board of education suspension report data. Suspensions are indicators of student unrest and discontent in the current educational environment. The suspension data from the board reports was compiled into a chart by the superintendent of schools for a grant proposal. He used the information as part of a proposal for an intradistrict choice program for the school district. Table one graphically illustrates the suspension increases at the

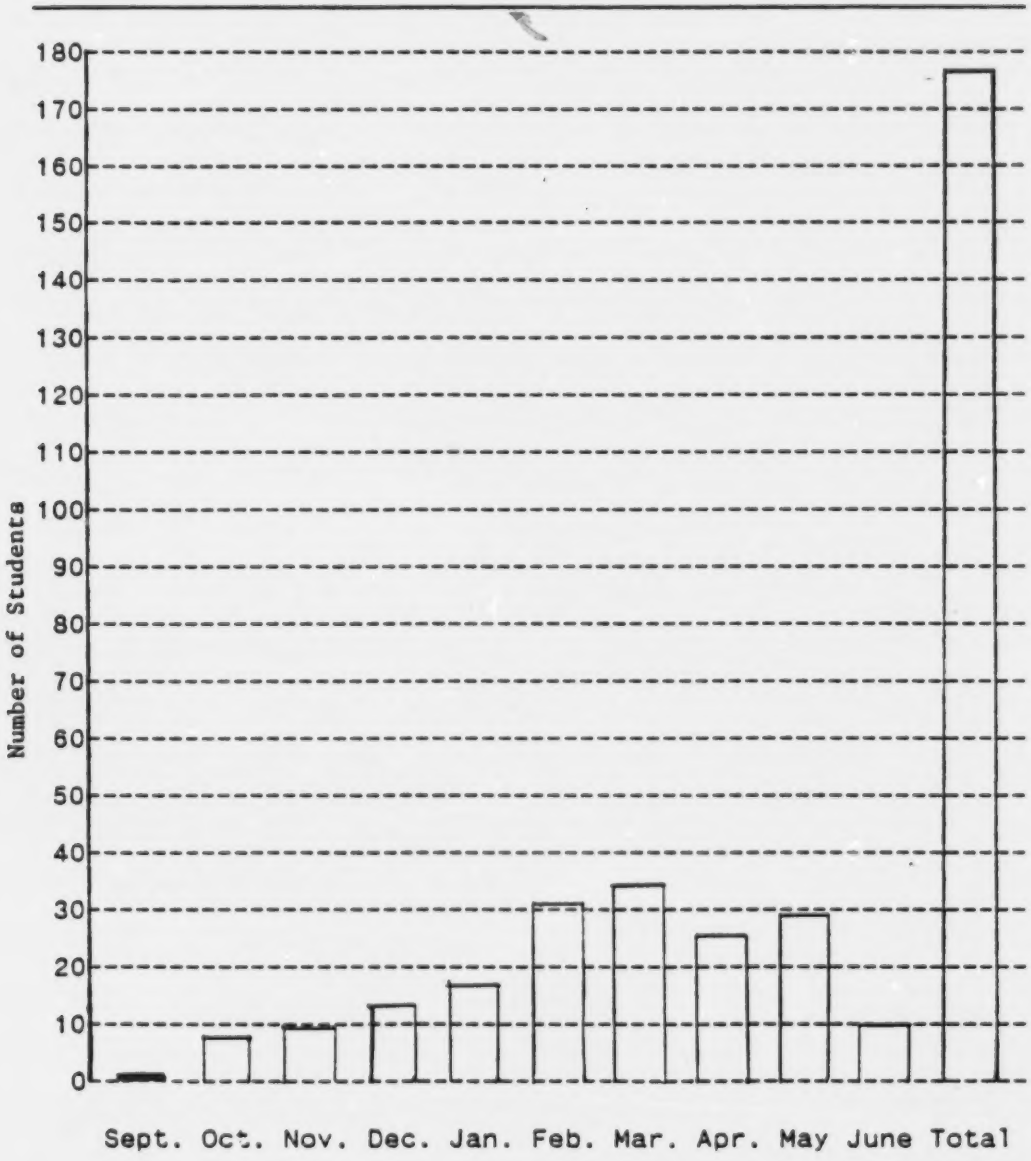
elementary level. The table comes directly from the grant application. This proposal (grant application) was submitted to the State Department of Education this past year.

The student population at the 4-6 level has remained stable over the past three years. All except four of the suspensions occurred at the 4-6 level.

At a recent district wide principal's meeting, the problem of a discipline code and, the overall rate of suspension for the elementary level were discussed. The K-3 principal's were shocked to find out there had been 177 suspensions in the previous year. Particularly when their records indicated that at the k-3 level there had only been four suspensions. A review of the board suspension information documents that the overwhelming majority of the elementary suspensions come at the 4-6 grade level.

Table 1

Suspensions K-6, 1989-90



Causative Analysis

There are many factors that influence the problem. One factor is the inability of the child from this age group to understand the appropriateness of the solutions they used to solve their in school problems. More often than not the child employs a solution that was used in the neighborhood where there are no hard and fast rules, to the in school situation, where the rules for behavior are very clear. As a result of this course of action, the child winds up in the principal's office for physical retaliation which is not acceptable in the school setting. This inability to see that neighborhood solutions do not apply in school, place the child in constant conflict with the school environment.

Another factor that is a part of this problem, comes into focus when we examine the teacher-student conflicts that arise. These conflicts come about for two major reasons. In one scenario, the child applies neighborhood solutions and their dealings with other adults, who have no authority over their lives, to the teacher who is trying to modify their inappropriate behavior. The result is a conflict that is viewed as willful disobedience and the child is sent to the office. The child may now rationalize that the teacher is against me and, therefore, repeats the behavior on future occasions. Eventually, after all other discipline policy procedures are exhausted, the district wide discipline policy indicates that suspension is

necessary. Once a child has been suspended, once they are at this level of the policy, a much lesser offense can lead to suspension at a later date. There is very little opportunity for the student to wipe the slate clean. The current time period for the reduction in placement on the discipline scale is meaningless, due to the length of time it takes and, the child's inability to deal successfully with a similar scenario at a latter date.

The same confrontation of student-teacher can unknowingly be escalated by the teacher, if the teacher is unable to cope with values and behaviors that may be foreign to their background. How often have we seen a child admonished by a teacher, the teacher literally taking the child's chin in hand and, saying that the child should look them in the eye when they are being spoken to. The teacher never realizes that in the child's culture, it is a sign of disrespect to look at the adult when your are being admonished for inappropriate behavior. They were always taught to look down at the ground in this situation. The teacher takes this a sign of guilt and continues to castigate the child. Some term this conflict situation as middle-class American values contradicting other cultural values.

The overriding factor at this point is that these children are not equipped to deal with these type of conflict situations, or many conflict situations they find

themselves in during the school day. In fact, they are unable to employ conflict resolution strategies that will lead to successful resolution of the problem, before it leads to suspension. The inability of the child to identify and implement other strategies for conflict resolution, allow the child to fall into the only pattern they know and understand. Unfortunately, all to often, the response they give to the conflict, is the inappropriate response that they have employed formerly, that leads to suspension.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

The problem discussed is not one that points to any one particular solution. There does seem to be an indication that if you are proactive when dealing with behavior problems your likelihood for success increases. There are many ways to get students at this age level to modify their behavior.

The writer's review of the literature points to many such proactive studies that dealt with this type of problem scenario. The studies reviewed indicate that this problem is not unique to the writer's school system. There is documentation of concern in this area from countries around the world. In each case of solution implementation, the researchers were proactive in problem identification and problem solutions.

Wheldall & Merrett (1988) surveyed 198 British elementary teachers and found that 51% believe they were spending too much time on behavior problems. Seventy-five percent identified boys as being more troublesome. The teachers were also asked to identify the most bothersome behaviors exhibited by these children. It was found that talking when they were not called on and hindering the progress of other students were the problems they observed most frequently.

Ewashen & Others (1988) describe how the Calgary School System had to establish a program that provided both short and long term counseling services for its disruptive elementary and middle school population. Aside from these services, the program also provided family counseling as well. In the evaluation of the program, they were found to have an 81% success rate with their population. The centers that were established were called Behavior Intervention Centers. The multifaceted nature of the approach and, the recognition that the problem must be addressed on the home front and, in school, seemed to contribute to the success of this model.

Cobb & Richards (1983) developed a program to help combat classroom behavior problems among elementary school children. The program involved counselor and teacher led guidance sessions. The program was aimed at improving classroom climate and decorum. Their results indicated that their small group counseling sessions and teacher consultations were successful in curtailing behavior problems. Again, we see classroom behavior problems are a major area of concern in this school setting.

Fontein (1978) found that many discipline problems arise when students are asked to perform beyond the limits of their understanding. The author employed techniques that dealt with helping slow learners become successful. Additionally, the author addressed group reading,

simulations, drills, and projects to improve student success and, thereby effect student behavior in a positive mode. Here we see that self-esteem is an important ingredient in student behavior. The whole child is addressed in a manner that addresses both the cognitive and affective domains. Student success and, a total understanding of where the child is academically, as well as emotionally, play an important part in this model. Understanding that students with severe behavior are of critical importance to the general success of the school, seems to be paramount in this study. Addressing the whole child is surely of importance in the long run, when considering strategies for disruptive students.

Parkhurst (1988) found that students had to be taught conflict resolution strategies and, the lack of this skill led to verbal and physical aggression. The author's goal was to decrease the number of times that a student would use verbal or physical aggression to solve conflict situations. Additionally, there was an effort to provide students with strategies for resolving these conflicts peacefully. Hence, the number of students referred to the principal decreased and there was a closer relationship developed between teachers and students. The study clearly points out that if you are not equipped to handle a conflict situation, you are more likely to fall back on a pattern that leads to verbal and physical aggression.

Foulks (1973) studied a group of fourth grade students in the New Orleans Public Schools. The purpose of the study was to achieve an understanding of the reasons that lead to student suspension in this group. The key factor examined was that of self-concept among the students who were suspended from low socioeconomic schools. The results were not startling, because these students were found to have a much lower self-concept than their non-suspended counterparts. A majority of the suspended students were Black males, who were over-aged for their grade and possessed poor academic skills. These students were frequently absent and showed lower mental ability generally. Again, we see the role self-concept plays in the behavior of students.

Cunningham & Sugawara (1988) conducted a study of 153 student teachers, that analyzed the behavior problems they could identify in students. Even among this idealistic group, they were not only able to identify behaviors that where socially defiant (such as destructiveness, aggression, and willful disobedience) but could discriminate them from behaviors that were resulting from social immaturity (shyness, anxiousness and withdrawal). They found that they were able to deal with the latter behaviors more successfully than the former.

Rubin (1977) found in a similar type of investigation, that elementary teachers had the same type of perceptions in

examining a group of urban white children in a longitudinal study. The purpose of the study was to examine the frequency and consistency of identification of behavior problem students among elementary school teachers. The author discovered that over half of the students involved were identified as behavior problems by their teachers at some point in the elementary years. Approximately three percent of the students were identified as problems, in each year of the six year period. With such a large number of children identified as behavior problems, the question that must be raised is, whether or not we are adequately dealing with students who posed some very basic behavior problems in class? Additionally, we must consider possible strategies and programs to help students deal with behavior related problems.

Morgan (1976) addresses a concern regarding how active Black children are dealt with by school personnel. He concludes that there are four ways that these children are dealt with in school. They are assigned to special learning centers, medication may be prescribed, they are suspended from school, or nothing is done to help them. It would seem that we are failing a large part of our minority population. This is especially disturbing when you realize that almost one half of our prison population is minority male. We must begin to equip school personnel with strategies to address

cultures that they are unfamiliar with or that do not align themselves with their value system.

Brophy (1980) conducted a study that is congruent to the writer's school district relative to the k-3 and 4-6 breakdown at the elementary level. Teachers were asked to respond to two disruptive behavior scenarios designed by the author. The teachers involved were from suburban and inner city settings. The study indicated teachers were generally unprepared and had a great deal of trouble in coping with aggressive student behavior. Many teachers, particularly in the inner city group, had no desire to deal with this type of student at all. There immediate response to a disruptive student was a referral to the principal. The message for the children is clear. If you do not fit in to my structure, then I will make no attempt to help you. He also found that the teachers who rated high in their ability to deal with this type of behavior, were more likely to try to turn the aggressive student around without a referral. Punishment was not their first course of action. Clearly, many teachers are at a loss when faced with a student or students who do not fit their concept of proper decorum.

In summary, we see that in each case there are many factors facing teachers regarding disruptive student behavior. Even if the behavior is severe and, has previously led to suspension, the child may not change. If we examine the key elements of each study, we can find many

common threads visible and, worthy of consideration in, dealing with the problem of elementary school suspensions.

Teachers must be offered viable and practical solutions to deal with the problem. Suspending a child, frequently becomes a fun day off for many of our children. Often, we are suspending these children and they are left at home alone during the entire day.

There many not be any one solution, that best addresses all the situations we have examined in the above mentioned literature. However, an analysis of successful programs and initiatives will shed some light on possible solution strategies and, ultimately on the solution strategy that the writer proposed in chapter four.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The following goals and objectives were projected for this practicum. The writer's goal in this practicum was to reduce the suspension rate among the elementary school population. This rate has increased by 375% over the past three years. Teachers and administrators have voiced increased concern over this growing problem. Although many reasons for the problems existence have been posed, no course of action has been designed to address the issue.

The writer expected to achieve a reduction in the number of students suspended among the identified elementary school population. Additionally, it is expected that counselors will continue to develop proactive strategies that will help them produce this reduction in the suspension rate. Behavioral referrals should also be reduced, because of their intervention in this area.

Students who previously experienced severe behavior problems that usually led to suspension, will learn new strategies to keep the from either defiant behavior or use of physical aggression. They will also become skilled at using conflict resolution strategies that will keep them in school.

Teachers will see that counseling, role playing, and various intervention strategies, will assist students in controlling their behavior. The counseling staff will also see improved behavior through their new intervention strategies. They will no longer identify their population, solely by means of referral after a problem has occurred (see Appendix A).

The success of the program will be measured by the reduction in suspension and behavior referrals, among the identified population, during the three month period of implementation.

Performance Objectives

The following objectives are an integral part of this practicum:

Objective 1: During the period of implementation students from the identified population, will learn how to use the skill of role playing in helping to identify potential conflict situations that have led to referral or suspension, as measured by the counselor's clinical journal (see Appendix B).

Objective 2: During the implementation period students from the identified population will learn how to use conflict resolution strategies to avoid behavior referrals and suspensions as evidenced by a comparison of suspensions.

Objective 3: During the implementation period students from the identified population will receive positive rewards

for employing new strategies that avoid potential conflict situations, either at the student-student level or the teacher-student level, as determined by the counselor's clinical journal.

Measurement of Objectives

Objective one was measured through the use of the counselors clinical journal, kept by the counselor's during the introduction of role playing situations. They were able to identify when children are able to successfully identify the situations and behaviors that previously led to referral or suspension.

Objective two was measured by comparing the total amount of suspensions among this group from this year to the previous year.

Objective three was measured by describing the rewards identified by each student and noting if they achieved the desired behavior modification to receive the reward. The information was kept as part of the counselor's clinical journal.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The literature indicates there is no one best way to deal with behavior problems that lead to student suspension. The literature clearly indicates there are many different approaches that have been successful. In fact, many successful programs implemented to date are multifaceted in their approach to this dilemma.

Huff (1988) found that he could design an in school suspension program that could alter student behavior patterns. He did this through a concept called, Personalized Behavior Modification. This was a curative in-school suspension program to show students the fundamentals of school behavior. The author found that the program was effective and perceived positively by staff. In school suspension programs have generally been successful, wherever they are employed. The positive perception of the staff is usually generated from their perception that behavior problems are being dealt with.

Blechman (1985) developed a module system that represented a sixteen step procedure you could employ to modify student behavior. These steps ranged from giving instructions that children can follow, to knowing what to do when a child refuses to go to a timeout area. Before the modules were employed, exhaustive background information

should be gathered on each child to assure that your address all aspects of the child's problem that lead to a behavior dysfunction. Again, we see that the whole child is being addressed. The more information you have on the child, the more probably it seems that success will be achieved.

Elliott (1986) found that children's behavior could be improved if they were involved in decisions about treatment for their misbehavior. Children were shown to make legitimate judgements about procedures to handle their behavior. The three areas examined were conceptual, psychometric, and paradigmatic issues in student behavior. Students who misbehave usually realize that their behavior is inappropriate. The key ingredient for success here seems to be, the child's understanding that their input was valuable. This would then have an effect on their self-esteem. Self-esteem plays an important role in the make-up of a disruptive child. Children who have a low sense of self-efficacy are more likely to become behavior problems as they strike out due to high levels of frustration.

Lowe (1984) was able to significantly improve school behavior in a school situation that was dominated by poor student attitudes. He did this "by setting, publicizing, and consistently enforcing clear rules; documenting infractions; involving parents, and generally encouraging student responsibility" (p. 8). In doing so, the author was

able to turn around a school that had been dominated by misbehaving students. Although this sounds like the way every principal should run their school, the solution went deeper than that. Expectations for students were clear and the structure was then provided for their success. When expectations are clear the likelihood for student success increases.

Norton & Others (1983) had 48 teachers and an equal number of parents evaluate the effectiveness of five procedures for reducing disruptive behavior among children. In all instances, the teachers rated the strategies more effective than did the parents. The three that rated the highest were, reinforcement, isolation and contractual agreement. Overall the procedures employed were deemed more acceptable for 5-year olds than 10-year olds. It does not surprise the writer that teachers found the strategies to be more effective. Teacher contact with a child is over a shorter period of time and consistent enforcement of behavioral strategies during school time is somewhat easier. The proactive nature of the process, coupled with the more than one approach model, probably aided in its successful rating among teachers.

Glickman & Wolfgang (1979) discovered that maybe the best approach in dealing with student behavior problems, was one in which a combination of principles was used. The thrust in this case is the realization that just one method

may not serve the needs of a diverse student population. All children respond differently to various discipline rules and structures. In providing more than one approach, you will reach a large part of your disruptive student population. This is not unlike the master teacher who employs more than one teaching strategy, when trying to meet the diverse needs of all the students in a class. This research provides additional evidence that supports the idea of attacking student behavior on more than one front.

Piedmont City School District (1984) took on a bold initiative when they implemented a program that helped students learn conflict resolution and problem solving skills. The program had two components. The principal held grade level meetings, at which time problem situations were discussed and, brainstorming for possible solutions occurred. Additionally, role playing was used to dramatize the situations and, students were asked to contribute solutions to the live scenario. Incidents for discussion came from actual school problems or could be made up by the principal. The second part of the program involved the formation of six teams of two fourth or fifth graders. These students were called in to assist in playground disputes and, were proactive in seeking to settle disputes before they reached a physical confrontation. They did not necessarily offer a solution, they instead served as mediators that helped the parties come up with their own

solution to the conflict. Because of the multi-faceted approach to teaching conflict resolution, recess problems were significantly reduced. Referrals to teachers and the principal for behavior problems were also reduced.

Buchanan (1988) conducted an interesting behavior modification program on a 14 year old learning disabled student. The student in question was one who exhibited severe problems in school. The solution for this child came about through an elaborate reward system that was devised by the author. The rewards were earned for appropriate behavior in class, as well as other aspects of school life, including school service which fostered a sense of leadership and responsibility with the child. We see evidence in this instance of a program that has many facets to it. None of the ideas would have work as well on an individual basis. However, the combination of strategies employed in the general plan, led to a successful intervention.

Van Houten & Others (1982) conducted three studies among elementary students that included both handicapped and non-handicapped students. The research in these studies clearly demonstrated that students responded positively to verbal reprimands regarding the effect it had on correcting a misbehavior. The reprimands were most effective in changing disruptive behavior when the were delivered with eye contact and, gripping of the students shoulders.

Additionally, the closer a person was standing to the student, the more effective the reprimand. The author also found that a reprimand directed at one child in a pair of disruptive students also reduced the negative behavior of the second child. Although this was an interesting approach, the tenor of the times would probably preclude teachers from gripping students on the shoulders in most of our public school settings.

The literature clearly reveals that a proactive approach is necessary to avoid conflicts that lead to suspension. Many times we find that administrators and teachers spend a majority of their time putting out fires, without paying attention to the underlying cause for the fire. Students need structure, rules, parameters, and guidelines that are clear, consistent, and easy to understand if we want them to be successful.

Teaching different strategies to staff along with different problem solving skills to children, who are potential suspension candidates, should help to reduce the amount of students who are referred for behavior problems. Ultimately, this would reduce suspensions among this group.

Role playing, with a system of rewards, will be beneficial as an additional tool in combating the behavior problems of many students.

Counseling sessions, as part of an overall program to help students identify why they are having problems in school, are an important of a good prevention program.

The background information collected on a child in other areas, such as academic performance or socioeconomic status, help in giving insight into a particular child's needs.

Lastly, we can surmise there is no one best way to alleviate the problem. As Glickman & Wolfgang (1979) point out, an eclectic model that employs many strategies is probably the most useful in combating disruptive student behavior.

Description of Selected Solution

It appears there are many approaches to improving student behavior in the school setting. The best tact, however, will be one of an eclectic approach in dealing with the problem (Glickman & Wolfgang, 1979, Blechman, 1985, & Piedmount City School District, 1984). The counselors will combine several approaches from existing models, with a few new ideas that the writer has generated. This will lead to a powerful tool that could address the issue in the writer's district.

The approach that the writer feels will be most effective, is one in which you first identify the students who have contributed to your suspension problem. Once you have done this, counselors will become proactive by

initiating counseling sessions (Cobb & Richards, 1983). You examine the students understanding of the reasons for their behavior problems, that led to suspension in the previous year. Once their level of understanding has been established, the counselors began a process of having them identify and, then role play through potentially volatile in school confrontations. Once they can identified these situations, they began instruction in conflict resolution strategies that began to help them through the conflict period (Piedmount City School District, 1985). Additionally, the counseling sessions based on this framework, immediately after a problem arose in school, included a follow-up with the parent.

Contracts and a system of positive reinforcement,were used as the child accrued good behavior time (Norton & Others, 1983, & Buchanan, 1988).

When you are dealing with student behavior, there is usually no one best method that always works. A multipronged approach, as was developed for this practicum, will help you deal with the diverse needs of the student population. The research indicates there are several successful ways that have been implemented in many places. In fact, there seems to be a higher success rate the more you vary the approach. By being proactive, as the writer has indicated, you get to the root of the problem first. The writer established strategies to avoid the worst case

scenario, which in these situations of behavioral outbursts, usually lead to suspension. If the child can understand why their behavior is inappropriate and, have a mechanism to deal with confrontational situations, they should then become more successful in dealing with their frustrations. Children do understand when they are wrong and, can make judgements regarding their poor behavior (Elliot, 1986). When a child can see that there are definite, clear and, understandable guidelines, that are consistently used, they are bound to exhibit better behavior (Lowe, 1984).

Initially, the writer met with the elementary guidance counselors to examine the suspension data for this the previous year. We identified the students who are still in the school, who have had a history of behavior problems that have led to suspension. This group of students was the first to enter our counseling sessions. We helped them identify why they had a problem in school in previous year(s). After the initial sessions, we moved into conflict resolution strategies, building self-esteem and learning to get along with others in the group. Once they develop an understanding of this model in role playing situations, we moved onto employing a contact and/or reward system to further modify their behavior. This reward system was employed with a majority of the students, however in a few instances it was not, because the child was not at the stage for the reward due to late referral or because the behavior

was altered significantly without the reward. We offered these services to new problem students as the need arose to fend off possible suspension of this group.

With this plan in mind, we followed the basic three month calendar and specific framework to the aforementioned solution strategy.

Report of Action Taken

The solution strategies for this practicum were implemented during the second week of school and the program was completed by December 21, 1990. The duration of the program was approximately 14 weeks. The actions taken are described on a weekly basis as list below. At the writer's initial meeting with the counselors the reward aspect of the program was modified to either two weeks or four weeks depending on the student's needs and chances for success. This determination was left to the individual counselor. The counselor's then followed the following procedures.

Week 1 - Identified pupils currently enrolled in the school who have a history of behavior problems that have lead to suspension. Met with the principal to identify any other potential behavior problems/disaffected students that he/she has concerns about. Contacted the parents of these students to inform them of our plan and arrange for a time that they can come to school during the three month intervention period, to support our initiative. Met with staff to get their input on students, including names of

other students they have concerns about. Examine school resource committee records to see what types of problems the child encountered during the previous year(s).

This process actually took the first two weeks to accomplish. Therefore, the programs next phase actually began in the third week. During these initial two weeks the writer met with the counselor's to go over any problems they might encounter.

Week 2 - Gathered additional background information on students, (i.e. grades, standardized test scores etc.) where applicable. Established an initial get acquainted meeting to put the child at ease with the adult.

Week 3 - Initiated counseling sessions with students to begin to identify the cause(s) of their problems the previous year.

Week 4 - Continued counseling sessions with students to clearly define the area that led to them getting into trouble the previous year(s).

At this point in the program quite a number of students who were new to the district, along with a few behavior referrals from students who were not new to the district, became part of the program. A determination was made by the writer that new students could be added to the program at any time (see Appendix C). Additionally, just before the holiday recess, we would examine information on those students who were in the program for more than ten weeks.

Week 5 - Instituted role playing situations that model the situations that led to their problems in the past. Identify in each instance, the response(s) that then led to their problem. Discuss what alternatives they might have to offer to deal more effectively with these situations. This will be an informal introduction to conflict resolution strategies they might develop.

In addition to this process, a part of this session and the following one was spent on building self-esteem. Students were also involved in group sessions on learning how to get along with each other. Therefore, this process actually took approximately two weeks and not one as originally planned. Week six activities then began in week eight.

Week 6 - Introduced and developed formal conflict resolution strategies aside from those offered by the student. Continued role playing with students and worked on strategies for each situation as the need arose. Began to identify situations in school, that were beginning to affect the student during this initial part of the school year.

Week 7 - Developed with the student, a reward that they would like to receive after a four week period, where they have successfully employed conflict resolution strategies that helped them stay out of trouble. Continue with previous weeks counseling. Began regular classroom visitation of students for a few minutes, one or two times a

week, in various classes, particularly if they were beginning to have problems in the class. In some cases, the visitations began earlier than this point, based on student need. Rewards can also be given after two weeks or not used if unnecessary.

Week 8 - Employed a contract that, if met, will lead to the child's reward that they have picked at the end of the two or four week period. The student and the counselor both signed the contract (see Appendix D). The parent either came to school at least once by this time or if it was impossible for the parent to come to school, a phone conference(s) were arranged to praise the child's progress. Continued counseling sessions.

Week 9 - Continued counseling, conflict resolution discussions and classroom visitations. Assessed progress of two week reward students to determine if modification was necessary.

Week 10 - Assessed students progress in obtaining their targeted goal for the four week students. If the child was falling short of the goal, established a goal they could obtain in two weeks time (see Appendix E). Continued counseling and class visitations. Rewarded two week goal students who were successful.

Week 11 - Met with each child to assess their progress with their behavior over the three month period. Supplied suitable rewards for children depending on their level of

success. Examined goal progress of two week group and readjusted if necessary and supplied rewards for the following session. These were formerly four week goal students.

Week 12 - Evaluated the progress of students to date. Continued counseling, collected school suspension data, and compared it to same three month period of the past year. Possible modifications to district policy regarding suspension will be considered in the spring semester.

The results of the program are detailed in the final chapter of the practicum report.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

The general goal of the writer's practicum was to reduce the suspension rate among the disaffected elementary school population. The writer's program was designed to address the suspension issue and, to create a proactive model for dealing with behavior problems before they led to suspension.

Students who previously experienced behavior problems, would now be taught a new array of strategies to help them overcome their problems. It was hoped that through this program, teachers and principals would have an alternative to use in lieu of behavior referral or student suspension. Ultimately, all staff would begin to use the program to head off potential behavior problems and conflict situations, before the child got to the point were suspension would be the only alternative.

Specific objectives of this program were designed to achieve these goals and expectations. The following information deals directly with each specific objective outlined, including the results achieved.

Objective 1: During the period of implementation students from the identified population, will learn how to use the skill of role playing in helping to identify potential conflict situations that have led to referral or suspension. As measured by the counselor's clinical journal.

In reviewing the clinical journals, a great deal of information that is pertinent to this objective can be garnered. Of the 84 clinical journals that were reviewed, it was noted that children were now more proficient at identifying the behaviors that caused them problems and could articulate the circumstances that led to their conflict. The identification of the behavior and the subsequent role playing had a positive effect on those students referred as it related to their ability to identify the problem and apply the proper behavior in group or individual counseling sessions.

The counseling staff and the writer felt that the role playing had some carryover to the classroom based on their observations of the students, however, the three month time period was not enough time to totally resolve a student's problem. Children were now able to give advice to a peer or make a constructive comment using words and ideas that had been put on the table by the counselor at previous sessions. Students have, at this point in time, begun to develop the ability to serve as problem solvers for their peers. The suggestions made by peers were taken quite positively by the children involved as they exchanged ideas in this open forum with an adult who cared about them.

The counselor's felt that for the most part this step was a precursor for the next level of use of these new found strategies, which would be for the resolution of their own

conflicts. Students who came in with conflicts, were also able to identify and articulate how they could handle a situation better the next time it occurred. Another interesting aspect of the conflict resolution counseling sessions happened because of the regularly scheduled counseling time. Students came to these sessions from time to time with a conflict that had just occurred in class or at home just prior to their arrival at school. Hence, the group had an immediate problem of great concern to discuss and deal with, if the child was willing to share his/her problem. In most cases, the children were very comfortable in the group and shared their problem openly.

The resolution of the problem was not the primary focus for the group. They brainstormed ideas that they had developed in previous sessions. Students in the groups synthesized what they learned and applied it to a specific problem, either their own problem or that of a peer.

Objective 2: During the implementation period students from the identified population will learn how to use conflict resolution strategies to avoid behavior referrals and suspensions, as evidenced by a comparison of suspensions.

The results for this objective show a significant decrease in the number of students suspended for the same time period, as compared to the year before. Tables 2 and 3 illustrate a comparison of last years suspension figures

(from page 8, Table 1) to the 1990-91 school year figures for the first four months of school.

Table 2

Suspensions 4-6, 1989-90

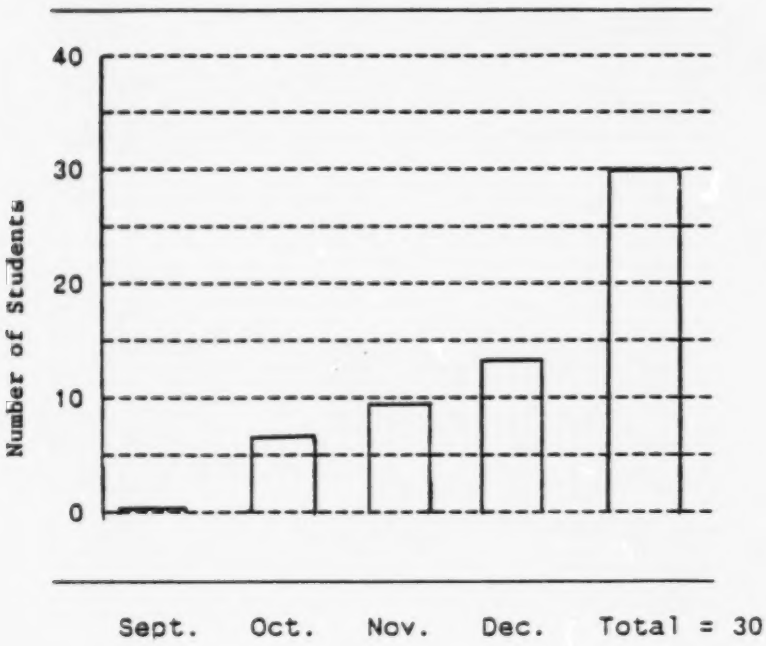
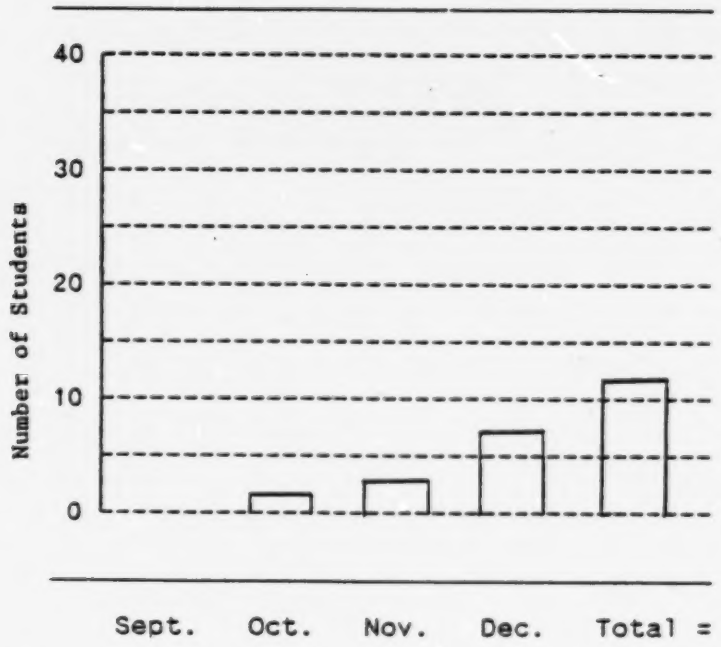


Table 3

Suspensions 4-6, 1990-91



As you can see from these two tables, there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of children suspended this year as compared to the previous year. These data were gathered directly from information reported to central administration from each building principal. The decrease in suspension from 30 to 12 represents a 60% decline in this number from the prior year. Additionally, counselors reported that many teachers had begun referring students to them if the behavior problems the students had in class were becoming more than the teacher could deal with, without constant interruption to his or her class.

Objective 3: During the implementation period students from the identified population will receive positive rewards for employing new strategies that avoid potential conflict situations, either at the student-student level or the teacher-student level, as determined by the counselor's clinical journal.

Instead of listing each reward that a child wanted and whether they received it, a description of the types of rewards used and the numbers of children at that level will give the reader a more concise picture of the achievement of this objective.

The counselor's felt, and the writer concurred, that the reward would have to be applied when the child was ready or, as in the majority of the cases, only if they needed something tangible. Sometimes the reward was not offered because the child had met with enough success and brought their behavior under control without the employment of the reward process.

Of the 84 children identified for this process, 61 went through the reward achievement part of the practicum. Table 4 summarizes the results for this group.

Table 4

Student Rewards

Total number of students in program	- 84
Number eligible to receive rewards	- 61
# that achieved rewards	= 31
# that were unsuccessful	= 18
# ongoing	= 12
Total	= 61

As you can see from the table, the number of students who achieved their reward far surpassed those who did not. The students in the ongoing category are students who have either fallen short and are trying again or students who just reached the reward stage.

The rewards offered by each counselor were left to their discretion. In each case, the counselor and the counselee decided what the suitable reward should be. One counselor kept the reward centered about school supplies. Hence, if a child met their goal they would be able to pick a specific school supply that they wanted. One counselor managed to involve the home in the reward scheme. A student was allowed to watch television as a result of a certain period of acceptable behavior. Additionally, there were the traditional rewards of ice cream or some other goody that

the child wanted. The counselors purchased the rewards with the knowledge that the writer would insure reimbursement for all expenses incurred during the project.

Discussion

Upon examining the results of each objective, clearly the objectives for the program were met. In each case, the information collected from the clinical journals and the suspension reports indicate that the program had a significant effect on the identified population. The dramatic decline in the suspension rate demonstrates that the program was effective for students who were previously suspended and the group who were referred due to severe behavior problems that could lead to suspension.

The counseling groups formed by the counselors, coupled with the strategies provided by the program, and a few that they added, led to a situation that achieved the desired proactive approach that proved to be effective (Piedmont City School District, 1984 & Parkhurst, 1988). The counseling strategies and conflict resolution scenario's provided the students with an opportunity to understand the type of behavior that led to their problems. Once they understood their behavior they could make decisions about how to improve (Elliott, 1986). The rewards the students chose rounded out the eclectic approach that was developed by the writer in this practicum. No single solution fit all the children (Glickman & Wolfgang, 1979).

Although the results of the objectives provide a great deal of information regarding the success of the program and the students involved, there is much information in the clinical journals that is of interest.

The counselors were asked to provide the writer with a summary of the perceptions of the program and any insights they had gained during implementation. It is these insights that warrant discussion since they are closely tied to the program and provide information about the students, their lives, the teachers, and other pertinent information of interest.

Almost all the students who were referred as present or potential discipline problems had very stressful home situations. All except two of the students in one of the schools lived in single parent homes. This fact was of interest to the writer and, upon further investigation, seems to be a fact of life for a majority of our children. If we were to randomly select 100 children born in 1986, we would find that of these 100 only 41 will reach their 18th birthday in traditional two parent families (Bennett, 1986). The single parent may therefore, be facing situations that contribute in some manner to the general behavior of their child. Many researchers are now addressing the issues surrounding single parent families. Some suggest that it is time for schools to evaluate how well they are delivering services to this group.

Although effective strategies varied from student to student, certain actions were helpful to some students and warrant future consideration in programs of this type. The writer suggested to the counseling staff that they be very visible once they became involved with a student. This included dropping in on the student in various classes and other frequent casual contact. The counselor's found that this encouraged students to seek them out when they were having difficulty, sometimes before a behavior referral was issued. Hence, many students became more receptive to suggestions and guidance from this non-judgemental adult.

In most cases, students were not referred because of negative interactions with peers. More often than not, the referral was made because of a negative interaction with the teacher. The teacher may, in some cases, be ill equipped to handle some of the behavior problems that arise in their classroom (Brophy, 1980, & Rubin, 1977). Therefore, the counselor's role was now expanded to include working with teachers in areas such as classroom management and enhancing self-esteem. Both counselors actively involved the teachers because of these findings. In some cases, the counselor's found that they were helping parents develop strategies for consistent home discipline. They developed this contact with the parent as part of the writer's practicum design (see Appendix F). Additionally, they made phone contacts to

praise students progress. These calls were particularly well received.

Aside from the self-esteem issue, students also developed a sense of comraderie as the group sessions progressed. They could learn how to cooperate and be respectful to each other, which sometimes was a precursor to an improvement in classroom behavior. The reward system was very successful. In some cases the counselor's consulted with the writer and decided that some children either did not need a reward or a reward was not feasible at this point in their working toward improved behavior.

Counselor's found that although they had planned out a particular session, occasionally a student would come in with a problem that had to be dealt with immediately. The positive aspect of this scenario was that children now had an actual problem to solve and many used their training to offer constructive suggestions on ways to alleviate or rectify the situation.

Teachers and principals used the counselors extensively as a result of the program. They also found in two or three cases after extensive intervention the child was still having severe problems. The administrator would then refer the student to the child study team. In each case, the referral resulted in classification.

Recommendations

1. It was felt by the writer and the counselors that the program has great potential and more time is needed to work with these and other children using this process. The program will therefore continue throughout this school year.
2. It is essential that counseling services for single parent families be explored. Additionally, we must begin to examine the need for additional elementary guidance counselors to prevent future problems.
3. Self-esteem for these children is a key component in the improvement of their behavior. All staff would probably benefit from training in building self-esteem in all our children.

Dissemination

The work from this practicum will be shared with the superintendent of schools, the district director of guidance services, the director of pupil devices, building principals, and elementary guidance staff. Additionally, this practicum is the major component of one of the district objectives that was submitted to the county superintendent of schools as part of the state requirement for New Jersey. Therefore, these findings must be presented to the county superintendent for state approval. The first meeting for dissemination of these findings is scheduled for January 15, 1991.

These findings will be included in the board of education general information packet and a part of public information for the town and staff. All cluster members will also have abstracts of the practicum for their information and use.

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APPENDIX A

BEHAVIOR PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION FORM

Behavior Problem Documentation

Number of students identified for program _____

Number of referrals leading to suspension _____

Number of principal referrals _____

Number of teacher referrals _____

Number of students identified by counselor for intervention prior to principal referral _____

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE CLINICAL JOURNAL

Clinical Journal Sample Page

Counselor _____

School _____

Date _____

Reason for referral _____

_____

_____

_____

Action taken _____

_____

_____

_____

Result _____

_____

_____

Reward _____

Achieved yes no

APPENDIX C

STUDENT REFERRAL FORM

ELEMENTARY GUIDANCE PROGRAM

Confidential Referral Form- for students with a pattern of behavior problems such that they are likely to be placed on the discipline code.

Name of Student_____ School_____

Referred by:_____ Grade _____

Homeroom Teacher_____ Date_____

Have parents been notified of the problem? YES ____ NO ____

Reason for referral _____

_____

_____

_____

Please check any additional characteristics/behaviors that may appiy.

_____ student is above average or above intelligence and ability, but achieving below his/her potential.

_____ student is frequently absent.

_____ student is frequently tardy.

_____ student possesses a poor self-image.

____ student is suffering from a stressful family setting.

____ student is hostile towards adults and/or authority figures.

____ student is unable to accept constructive criticism.

____ student has poor peer relationships.

COMMENTS: _____

_____

(USE OTHER SIDE IF NEEDED.)

OFFICIAL STUDENT-COUNSELOR CONTRACT

If _____

_____

_____

Then _____

_____

_____

This contract will go from _____ to _____

_____ _____

Student's Signature Counselor's Signature

_____ _____

Parent's Signature Teacher's Signature

APPENDIX E

TEACHER FEEDBACK FORMS

ELEMENTARY GUIDANCE PROGRAM

Date _____

Dear _____

This week_____will be trying to work on

_____.

Please indicate whether you have noticed improvement and leave this form (or other note) in my mailbox next _____ morning. Your student is aware that I have given you this communication.

Improvement was evident: _____yes _____no

COMMENTS:

Signature_____

Thanks your for your cooperation. I value your feedback.

ELEMENTARY GUIDANCE PROGRAM

Date _____

Dear _____

This week_____will be trying to work on

_____.

Please indicate whether you have noticed improvement and leave this form (or other note) in my mailbox next _____ morning. Your student is aware that I have given you this communication.

Improvement was evident: _____yes _____no

COMMENTS:

Signature_____

Thanks your for your cooperation. I value your feedback.

ELEMENTARY GUIDANCE PROGRAM

Evaluation of Student's Progress

Teacher: Student:

Has improvement been shown in the following areas?

	Yes	No	Never a problem
Behavior			
Attendance			
Grades			
Attitude towards school			
Work habits			
Peer relationships			

Comments:

Teacher Signature _____ PLEASE RETURN BY____

Thank you,

, Guidance Counselor

ELEMENTARY GUIDANCE PROGRAM

Evaluation of Student's Progress

Teacher: Student:

Has improvement been shown in the following areas?

	Yes	No	Never a problem
Behavior			
Attendance			
Grades			
Attitude towards school			
Work habits			
Peer relationships			

Comments:

Teacher Signature _____PLEASE RETURN BY _____

Thank you,

, *Guidance* Counselor

APPENDIX F

SAMPLE PARENT LETTER

Dear _____,

I am the guidance counselor at Hillcrest School. Your child's teacher and I feel that _____ would benefit from being included in one of my programs. These programs include small groups of students with whom I meet to work on changing or improving behaviors to help each student achieve his/her full potential and to have a positive and productive school experience. We deal with topics such as organizing time, setting goals, making decisions, solving problems, getting along with others students, responsibility, self-esteem, etc.

As I work with your child, I will also be working with his/her teacher(s). I will also be contacting you when I feel your support is necessary. I feel school and parents need to be in touch and work together to educate children.

If you have any questions or concerns about this program please call the Hillcrest School office and leave a message for me. I am in the school every day. I will return your call as soon as possible.

Sincerely yours,

Guidance Counselor